LCMS

Liturgical Glossary

Table of Contents

(To navigate the document, hold down your control key and click the appropriate heading)

Liturgical Glossary A—E 2

"A" Definitions 2

"B" Definitions 4

"C" Definitions 5

"D" Definitions 7

"E" Definitions 8

Liturgical Glossary F—P 9

"F & G" Definitions 9

"H" Definitions 10

"I & K" Definitions 11

"L" Definitions 12

"M" Definitions 13

"N & O" Definitions 14

"P" Definitions 15

Liturgical Glossary Q—Z 16

"R" Definitions 16

"S-T" Definitions 17

"U-Z" Definitions 19

Liturgical Glossary A—E

"A" Definitions

Aaronic Benediction

The familiar blessing that begins, "The Lord bless you and keep you." It is given the name "Aaronic" because it is the blessing God commanded Moses to give to his brother Aaron to speak to the people (Num. 6:24—26).

Absolution

Following the confession of sins, the Absolution pronounces God's forgiveness either in a direct form ("I absolve/forgive you") or in a declarative form ("God forgives you all yours sins"). The word comes from the Latin, absolvere, which means "to loosen, set free, or absolve" (Jn 20:23).

Advent

The first season of the church year, Advent serves to prepare us for the coming celebration of Christ's birth. The word comes from the Latin, advenire, which means "to come." Advent themes include not only Christ's coming at Bethlehem but also his coming now in Word and Sacrament and his final coming in glory.

Agnus Dei (AH-nyoos DAY-ee)

Latin for "Lamb of God," this hymn in the communion liturgy draws on the words of John the Baptist who pointed his disciples to Jesus, the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29). In the context of the communion liturgy, we are praying to Christ who is there present in his body and blood to have mercy on us and grant us peace.

Alb

This close-fitting, white garment is the standard vestment for pastors, especially at the Divine Service. The name comes from the Latin word for white, alba.

Alleluia

Hebrew for "praise the Lord" (though in its Greek spelling). It is a word of joy and gladness. An ancient custom is to refrain from using Alleluia during Lent in order to distinguish the penitential nature of this season from the exuberance of the Easter season that follows.

All Saints' Day

An ancient observance on November 1 that originally commemorated the martyrs of the church (those who had died for the faith). It has since been expanded to include all who die in the faith. Because all who belong to Christ are saints, the festival also rightly emphasizes our unity with all believers, both living and dead.

Altar

Together with the font and pulpit, the altar is the chief focal point of the church building. Here heaven and earth are united as the body and blood of Jesus are given under the elements of bread and wine for our forgiveness, and the prayers of God's people are offered on behalf of the church and the world.

Amen

Of Hebrew origin, "Amen" means that what has preceded is "true and certain." Thus, as the congregation's response to prayers, the Amen is an affirmation that the prayer just prayed is the prayer of the entire assembly, spoken on their behalf. In the Small Catechism, Luther explained Amen with: "Yes, yes, it shall be so."

Annunciation

A liturgical celebration on March 25 (nine months before Christmas) to observe the announcement of the angel Gabriel to Mary that she would give birth to the Son of God (Lk 1:26—38).

Antiphon (AN-tih-fonn)

A refrain-like verse from Scripture that begins and concludes a psalm or canticle. Sometimes it is also interspersed within a psalm.

Apostles' Creed

Though not written by the apostles (a common assumption in the Middle Ages) the Apostles' Creed faithfully summarizes the apostolic teaching of Holy Scripture. Its origins date back to the second century where it developed as a statement of faith in conjunction with Holy Baptism. In most churches it is still used at every baptism.

Ascension

Observed on the 40th day of Easter, always a Thursday, the Ascension commemorates Jesus' final appearance to his disciples before ascending to the Father (Acts 1:1—11).

Ash Wednesday

This day, which marks the beginning of Lent, is 40 days before Easter. (Sundays are not included in the count.) The theme of the day is repentance, which in some churches is visually depicted by the placing of ashes on the forehead while the words of Gen. 3:19 are spoken: "From dust you are and to dust you will return."

Athanasian Creed

One of the three ecumenical (universally accepted) creeds, it probably originated around A.D. 500. Though it bears the name of Athanasius (fourth century), it was certainly not written by him. This creed is a grand expression of the Trinitarian faith.

Return to Table of Contents

"B" Definitions

Baptismal Garment

The baptism service provides the option of laying a white cloth on the newly baptized, symbolizing the righteousness (purity) of Christ with which they have now been clothed (Gal. 3:27). This practice is reminiscent of an ancient practice of clothing the newly baptized in a white garment. A vestige of this tradition is the use of a christening gown which is often handed down from generation to generation. (See also Rev. 7:9—17.)

Benedictus (Beh-neh-DIK-tuss)

Zechariah's song of praise following the birth and naming of his son, John the Baptist (Lk. 1:68—79). Benedictus is Latin for "blessed be."

Bowing

Since early times Christians have bowed as a sign of reverence. Usually a slight inclination of the head or upper body, bowing is often done when approaching the altar and at certain places in the liturgy, like during the voicing of the triune name in the Gloria Patri. As with all customs that are neither commanded nor forbidden, bowing (or not bowing) should not be used as a test of one's piety.

Return to Table of Contents

"C" Definitions

Canticle

A biblical song, other than a psalm. The most familiar canticles are the songs of Zechariah (the Benedictus; Lk. 1:68—79), Mary (the Magnificat; Lk. 1:46—55), and Simeon (the Nunc Dimittis; Lk. 2:29—32). There are numerous Old Testament canticles, including the songs of Miriam and Hannah and several from the book of Isaiah. The Revelation to St. John also includes several canticles.

Cantor/Kantor

One who leads singing, especially that of the congregation. One of Luther's associates, Johann Walter, is considered the first Lutheran cantor. J. S. Bach is probably the most renowned cantor. The term is finding increased use among those who are called to oversee the congregation's music-making and to work with the pastors in service planning.

Cassock

A full-length, black garment that is worn under other vestments, most often the surplice. In addition to the clergy, the cassock may also be worn by others, including acolytes and choir members.

Catechumen

A catechumen is a "learner," one who is being instructed in the Christian faith. In the early church, a catechumen was one who underwent rigorous instruction in preparation for Holy Baptism. The word comes from the Greek and means "to echo" or "sound in the ear." Catechumens were traditionally taught through question and answer, with the answer echoing back what was first taught. A catechism is a book of instruction, often in the form of questions and answers.

Catholic

In the original versions of the ecumenical creeds, the word "catholic" is used to describe the entire church or the Christian faith. In this context, to call oneself "catholic" is to confess the fullness of the Christian faith without alteration. In order to avoid confusion, it is best to use the full name, Roman Catholic Church, when referring to that church body.

Chalice

A Middle English word from the Latin calix, meaning "cup," the chalice is the cup used to distribute the blood of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar.

Chancel

The section of a church building beyond the nave where the altar and pulpit (and often the font) are located.

Chanting

A method of singing liturgical texts that are not metered (as in a hymn). Most chant consists of short phrases that are sung responsively between pastor and people. Psalms may also be chanted as well as parts of the liturgy (e.g., the Gloria in excelsis, The Lutheran Hymnal, p. 17).

Chasuble (CHAZ-uh-bul)

A loose-fitting, poncho-like vestment worn by the celebrant at the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It is usually in the color of the day.

Church Year

The church's calendar, which developed over centuries, provides a yearly rehearsal of the life and teaching of Christ. The first half begins with Advent and continues with Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost. The second half of the year (Sundays after Pentecost/Trinity) focuses on the ministry of Christ, concluding with an emphasis on the End Times.

Ciborium (sih-BOAR-ee-oom)

Similar in shape to a chalice and covered with a lid, the ciborium contains the wafers used in holy communion. Usually the wafers are transferred to a paten (plate) from which they are distributed.

Collect (KOLL-ekt)

A concisely written prayer that "collects" the prayers of the people. The Collect of the Day is prayed toward the beginning of the Divine Service, prior to the reading of Holy Scripture. The collect usually follows a pattern of: address to God, basis for the prayer, petition, desired benefit or result, and Trinitarian termination.

Compline (KAHM-plin)

Similar in nature to bedtime prayers, Compline is the last of the daily prayer offices that came into use during the Middle Ages. Prayed in later evening, the service is simple in nature and includes this appropriate antiphon for use with the Nunc Dimittis: "Guide us waking, O Lord, and guard us sleeping, that awake we may watch with Christ and asleep we may rest in peace."

Concertato (kahn-sir-TAH-toe)

Usually a hymn-based composition that brings together contrasting musical forces of congregation, choir, and instruments. Hymn concertatos bring variety and musical richness to hymn singing.

Cope

A vestment worn over an alb or surplice, usually in processions and/or for the Daily Offices. The cope is usually in the color of the season.

Crucifer

The person who carries a cross in procession. Comes from two Latin words which literally mean "to carry a cross."

Crucifix

A Middle English term derived from the Latin, meaning "fastened to a cross." A crucifix is a cross that bears the image of the crucified Christ, pointing to the reality of the One who came in the flesh to be the Savior of the world.

Return to Table of Contents

“D” Definitions

Daily Office

Services of prayer offered at established times each day. Already at the time of Jesus, set times for prayer were customary (Acts 3:1). By the sixth century, eight services of prayer, which included psalms and readings from Scripture, were observed in the monasteries. Since the Reformation, this schedule has been simplified to three times of prayer: morning (Matins), afternoon/evening (Vespers), and close of the day (Compline).

Divine Service

The name commonly given to the regular weekly service that includes the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Derived from the German Gottesdienst ("God's service"), its meaning is dual in nature. In worship, God serves us with his gifts of forgiveness and life, and we respond in service to him through our sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise.

Doxology

From the Greek for "words of praise." It is an expression of praise to God, usually in a trinitarian formulation. The Gloria Patri ("Glory be to the Father and to the Son…"), is a common doxology used to conclude psalms and many canticles. Many hymns have a concluding, doxological stanza that praises the Holy Trinity. The most familiar of these stanzas is known as the Common Doxology ("Praise God from whom all blessings flow…")

Return to Table of Contents

“E” Definitions

Easter Vigil

Occurring on the eve of Easter, the structure of this service dates back to the second century, making it one of our most ancient services. The service is constructed in four parts: light, Word, Baptism, and Lord's Supper. The Vigil serves each year as the church's first celebration of the resurrection.

Epiphany

From the Greek, meaning "to appear." Observed on January 6, Epiphany is the church's celebration of the proclamation of Jesus' birth to the Gentiles; hence, the reading of the story of the visit of the Magi from Matt. 2. Originally, and still in the Orthodox churches, Epiphany served as the celebration of Jesus' birth. It wasn't until the fourth century that Dec. 25 was established in the western church for this celebration.

Epistle

Greek for "letter." The New Testament contains 22 epistles written by Saints Paul, Peter, John, and others, that were addressed to Christian churches scattered throughout the Roman Empire. The second reading in the Divine Service is usually taken from one of these epistles.

Eucharist (YOU-kahr-ist)

One of the many terms for the Lord's Supper. It comes from the Greek word meaning "thanksgiving." Even as Jesus gave thanks when he instituted the Lord's Supper, so do we give thanks that in this holy meal our Lord gives us his body and blood for forgiveness and life.

Return to Table of Contents

Liturgical Glossary F—P

"F & G" Definitions

Flagon

From a Latin word meaning "bottle" or "flask." A flagon is a large pouring vessel that contains wine for use during distribution of the Lord's Supper. The blood of Christ is poured from the flagon into a chalice.

Funeral Pall

A large, white cloth that covers a closed casket during the funeral service. Based on St. John's vision of the saints in heaven (Rev. 7:9), the pall symbolizes the white robe of righteousness given to all believers in Christ. The pall is also a reminder of the white garment sometimes given at the time of Baptism and symbolizes the new life in Christ first given at Baptism and now fully realized in death.

Gloria in excelsis (GLOR-ee-ah in ex-SHELL-sis)

Also known as the "greater doxology," this is the hymn of praise sung at the beginning of the Divine Service. It originates from the fourth century and has been in regular use for over a millennium. The canticle begins with the angel's song in Luke 2:14 and then continues with a hymn of praise to the triune God, focusing chiefly on the saving work of Jesus, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." It is omitted during Advent, in anticipation of the celebration of Jesus' birth at Christmas, and during Lent, a season of penitence.

Gloria Patri (GLOR-ee-ah PAH-tree)

Latin for "glory to the Father." The complete text is: "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen." Also known as the "lesser doxology," this ascription of praise is appended to psalms and other liturgical texts.

Gradual

A selection of psalm verses traditionally sung between the Epistle and Gospel. With the regular use of the Old Testament reading, the Gradual now appears after that reading, before the Epistle. The word Gradual is from the Latin for "step," which refers to the step of the lectern from which the Gradual was traditionally sung.

Return to Table of Contents

“H” Definitions

Holy Gospel

Refers to the reading of one of the evangels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) in the Divine Service. The reading of the words of Jesus is given the highest place of prominence by being read last. At services when the Lord's Supper is celebrated, the congregation stands for the reading. Especially on high festivals like Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, etc., the Gospel may be read from the center of the nave, symbolizing what it means that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The movement to and from this location is referred to as the Gospel Procession.

Holy Innocents

Observed on December 28, this festival commemorates the baby boys of Bethlehem who were executed by King Herod in his attempt to murder the newborn king of the Jews (Matt. 2).

Homily

From the Greek for "discourse." A homily is a sermon on a biblical text. There is no distinction between a homily and sermon.

Hosanna

From Hebrew, its basic meaning is "to save." It functions as a plea to God our king to have mercy on us and save us from our lost condition.

Host

From Latin, means “sacrifice, victim.” This term is used for the individual Communion breads or wafers.

Return to Table of Contents

"I & K" Definitions

Icon

A style of sacred art usually associated with Eastern Orthodox churches. Painted according to strict guidelines, the two-dimensional paintings are intended as windows into heaven and form the basis for a rich devotional piety.

Incense

From the Latin word "to set on fire." In Jewish worship in the temple, incense symbolized prayer rising before God (Ps. 141:2). The same image is used of the prayers of the saints in heaven (Rev. 8:3—5). In use in the Christian Church for over 1,500 years, the sweet smelling aroma engages another of the senses. Its association with prayer recommends it for use at any service, but especially the prayer offices (see Daily Office).

Introit (in-TRO-it)

From the Latin, meaning "to enter." Traditionally this was the entrance hymn to the Divine Service, consisting of antiphon, psalm, Gloria Patri, and antiphon repeated. During the Middle Ages it was shortened considerably and lost its function as an entrance hymn.

Invitatory (in-VYE-tah-toe-ree)

An antiphon preceding the Venite in Matins/Morning Prayer, this variable introduction concludes with the invitation, "O come, let us worship Him."

Invocation

From the Latin, "to call upon." Used at the beginning of many, though not all, services. It serves as a reminder of Baptism and may be accompanied by the sign of the cross.

Kyrie eleison (KEE-ree-ay ay-LAY-ee-zon)

From the Greek, it is a direct address to God, meaning "Lord, have mercy." The ten lepers, blind man Bartimaeus, and others addressed Jesus with these words. The Kyrie appears early in the Divine Service. It is not part of the confession of sins but a cry to God to have mercy on us and all humanity.

Return to Table of Contents

“L” Definitions

Lectern

The lectern is the reading stand from which the Word of God is read. In some churches it is highly ornamented, though usually less so than the pulpit.

Lectionary

A schedule of readings from Holy Scripture for use in the weekly liturgy. In current use are both an historic, one-year lectionary with readings that have been in use for centuries, and a more recently developed three-year lectionary. Use of a lectionary provides the congregation with the opportunity to hear carefully chosen sections from the entire Bible.

Lent

The penitential period of preparation before the celebration of Jesus' resurrection. Its 40-day duration (not counting the Sundays in Lent) begins on Ash Wednesday which can occur as early as Feb. 4 and as late as Mar. 10, depending on the date of Easter. In the early church, Lent developed as a time of intense instruction for those who would be baptized at the Easter Vigil. The name comes from the Anglo-Saxon word for "spring" and the Old English word for "lengthen," as in the lengthening of days with the approach of spring (in the northern hemisphere).

Litany

In general, a responsory prayer with repeated congregational responses. In the Divine Service, the Kyrie is sometimes cast in the form of a litany, with the congregation responding to each petition with the words, "Lord, have mercy." An expanded form of this litany is found in Evening Prayer. The most comprehensive form of the litany is the medieval version that was revised by Luther and still appears in hymnals today.

Liturgy

In the Lutheran Confessions, liturgy is defined as "public service" in the sense that the proclamation of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments is God's service done on behalf of his people. Sometimes the word is used to denote an order of service, though the more specific terms "order of service" or "ordo" are preferred.

Return to Table of Contents

“M” Definitions

Magnificat (mahg-NIF-ih-kaht)

The opening word in the Latin text of the song of Mary from Luke 1:46—55, "My soul magnifies the Lord." This New Testament canticle has been sung at the daily service of Vespers (Evening Prayer) for some 1,500 years.

Mass

One of the names for the service of Word and Sacrament. The term is used this way in the Lutheran Confessions, though in his later years, Martin Luther used it less frequently. More common terms among Lutherans are Divine Service, the Lord's Supper, and the Sacrament of the Altar.

Matins

The first of eight daily prayer services that developed during the Middle Ages for use in the monasteries. At the time of the Reformation, these services were reduced to two: Matins in the morning and Vespers in the evening. Matins is a Middle English word that comes from Latin for "of the morning."

Maundy Thursday

From the Latin word mandatum, which means "command." The reference is to the Holy Gospel appointed for the day from John 13:34, "A new command I give you: Love one another." Also called “Holy Thursday.”

Return to Table of Contents

"N & O" Definitions

Narthex

Greek for "enclosure." The narthex is an entryway or gathering room that leads into a church.

Nave

From the Latin navis, which means ship. The nave is the main section of a church where the worshipers are gathered. The term may have derived from the ship-like appearance of early naves or from the early church understanding of the church as the ark of salvation.

Nicene Creed (nye-SEEN)

Composed in A.D. 325 at a council of bishops (pastors) in Nicaea as a defense against the false teaching that Jesus was not true God. The creed was expanded to its present form at the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381. It has been used in the Divine Service as a corporate confession of the faith for centuries.

Nunc Dimittis (noonk di-MIT-iss)

Latin for "now dismiss." These are the words spoken by Simeon as he held the 40-day-old Jesus in his arms (Luke 2:25—35). One of the New Testament canticles, it was traditionally used in the daily service of Compline and as an alternate to the Magnificat in Vespers. In the Lutheran Church it is also appointed for use following the distribution of the Lord's Supper.

O Antiphons

Refrains that developed during the eighth century for use with the Magnificat at Vespers on the days leading up to Christmas (Dec. 17—23). Each is addressed to Christ, using an Old Testament image (O Wisdom, O Adonai, O Root of Jesse, O Key of David, O Dayspring, O King of the Nations, O Emmanuel). The antiphons are also reflected in the seven stanzas of "Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel" (LSB 357).

Ordinary

Those parts of the service that remain constant from week to week. For centuries the ordinary of the weekly communion service were the Kyrie, Gloria in Excelsis, Nicene Creed, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei. Countless composers have written complete musical settings using these texts. The parts of the service that change from week to week are called the propers.

Ordo

Latin for "order." The term is used to refer to an order of service.

Return to Table of Contents

“P” Definitions

Paraments

This is the general term given to all of the liturgical cloths that are placed on the altar, pulpit, and lectern. The paraments are usually fashioned in various colors for use during specific seasons and days of the church year.

Paschal Candle (PASS-kel)

A large candle that has special significance during the Easter Vigil. It is also used at baptisms and funerals. Ordinarily it is located near the font. During the Fifty Days of Easter (Easter through Pentecost) it is placed near the altar, and at funerals it stands near the casket. Paschal comes from the Greek work for Passover and refers specifically to the celebration of Christ's resurrection.

Passion Sunday

In the three-year lectionary, the Sunday before Easter. Traditionally referred to as Palm Sunday, the day commemorates the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem but then shifts focus toward the suffering that Jesus endured on our behalf. In the historic one-year series, the fifth Sunday in Lent is called "Passion Sunday."

Paten (PATT-en)

Latin for "dish." A paten is a plate, usually made of a precious metal like silver, from which the body of Christ is distributed.

Pax Domini (POX DOE-mee-nee)

Latin for "peace of the Lord." Prior to the distribution of the Lord's body and blood, the pastor blesses the people with the words, "The peace of the Lord be with you always."

Pentecost

From the Greek for "fiftieth day." Pentecost is the liturgical celebration of that 50th day of Easter when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples, marking the birth of the church. Liturgically, Pentecost is not the beginning of a new season, but the culmination of Easter.

Pericope (per-IK-oh-pee)

A pericope is a section of Holy Scripture that is read in a service. Since the eighth century, pericopes have been gathered together in lectionaries in which readings are appointed for each Sunday or festival. From the Greek, meaning to "cut around."

Preface

The opening dialogue between pastor and people that begins the liturgy of Holy Communion. These words, dating from the second century, are likely the most ancient part of the Divine Service.

Propers

Those parts of the service that change from week to week, including the Introit, Collect, Gradual, readings, hymns, etc. The changing propers give shape and direction to the church year calendar.

Return to Table of Contents

Liturgical Glossary Q—Z

"R" Definitions

Reproaches

Part of the Good Friday liturgy, these responses between pastor and congregation are drawn from Micah 6:3—4. Three times the question is asked: "What have I done to you, O My people," and in response, the congregation responds with a plea for God's mercy.

Rite

An order of service, often used to refer to occasional services like the rite of marriage or rite of ordination.

Rubric (ROO-brik)

Directions or instructions on how to conduct the service. Rubrics are often printed in red to distinguish them from the text of the service. The word comes from the Latin ruber, which means "red."

Return to Table of Contents

"S-T" Definitions

Sacristy (SACK-riss-tee)

From the Latin sacristia, meaning "holy things." The room where the communion vessels and paraments are kept. The vestments for pastor and liturgical assistants may also kept here or in a separate room, the vestry.

Salutation

From the Latin salutatio, meaning "a greeting." A liturgical greeting by which the pastor blesses the people: "The Lord be with you." The traditional response, "and with your spirit," acknowledges that this blessing is spoken by the Lord's servant. The Salutation occurs before the Collect of the Day and at the beginning of the communion liturgy.

Sanctuary

From the Latin sanctuarium, meaning "a holy place." Refers to the area surrounding the altar, which is often enclosed by a communion rail, setting it off from the nave, the place where the people are seated.

Sanctus (SAHNK-tus)

A Latin word meaning "holy." The Sanctus is the liturgical song sung at the beginning of the communion liturgy. It is drawn from the song of the angels in Is. 6:3. The concluding text, "blessed is He who comes…" is from Ps. 118:26 and Mk. 11:9—10.

Sign of the Cross

In the Small Catechism Luther encouraged that the sign of the cross be made each morning and evening as a reminder of one's baptism. The cross is signed by touching the fingers first to the forehead, then to the heart, then to one shoulder and finally to the other. Appropriate points in the Divine Service to make the sign of the cross include the Invocation, Absolution, conclusion of the Creed, upon reception of Holy Communion, and the Benediction.

Stanza

The proper designation given to the major divisions of a hymn. The term "verse" is more properly used to designate divisions within a psalm.

Stole

A scarf-like fabric usually crafted in the color of the day or season, often bearing symbols appropriate to the day or season. It is worn over the shoulders of those ordained to the pastoral office.

Stripping of the Altar

A ceremony that may conclude the Maundy Thursday service in which the altar is "stripped" of all its appointments (candles, vessels, linens, etc.). Other ornaments may also be removed from the sanctuary. The ceremony symbolizes the stripping of Jesus by his captors (both of his clothing and his honor) as well as the abandonment by his disciples. Usually Psalm 22 is prayed while the altar is stripped.

Surplice (SIR-pliss)

A flowing, white vestment worn over a cassock (a fitted vestment usually in black). The cassock/surplice combination is frequently worn at the daily offices (Matins, Vespers, etc.). It is also the vestment frequently worn by other assistants (e.g., acolytes) and by choir members.

Te Deum Laudamus

Latin for "You, God, we praise." The opening words of an ancient hymn of praise most often sung at Matins/Morning Prayer. The author is unknown, though liturgical legend holds that it was composed spontaneously by Ambrose and Augustine as Ambrose baptized Augustine in the late fourth century.

Tenebrae (TEN-uh-bray)

A Good Friday service, though originally observed earlier in Holy Week. Candles are extinguished following a series of readings and/or psalms.

Tract

An older term for the Verse (see below) during Lent, when Alleluias are omitted.

Triduum (TRIDD-ooh-um)

Latin for "three days," namely, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. (Some include the day of Easter as well.) The Triduum celebrates the saving work of Jesus' death and resurrection. It culminates with the Easter Vigil on Saturday evening.

Return to Table of Contents

“U-Z” Definitions

Venite

Latin for "oh, come." The title for the song of praise taken from Psalm 95 that is sung at the beginning of Matins/Morning Prayer. The first line reads, "Oh, come, let us sing to the Lord."

Verba

Latin for "words." A technical term used to refer to the Words of Institution. Usually used in conjunction with other words, like verba testamenti ("words of the [new] testament) or verba Domini ("words of the Lord").

Verse

A biblical text sung prior to and in anticipation of the Holy Gospel. Except during Lent, the Verse is preceded and followed by the singing of alleluias. Individual proper Verses are appointed for each Sunday and festival; a general Verse is provided for use throughout the year.

Versicle

From the Latin versiculus, meaning "little verse." One or more verses, usually from a psalm, read responsively. Versicles often appear at the beginning of a service (e.g., Matins and Vespers, special rites of dedication, etc.)

Vespers

A Latin word meaning "evening." Originally one of eight daily offices prayed during the Middle Ages, Vespers was retained at the time of the Reformation as one of two daily services, the other being Matins. Sometimes also referred to as Evening Prayer.

Vestments

From the Latin vestimentum, meaning "garment." Vestments are worn by the pastor and other liturgical assistants. Among their many purposes is the fact that they identify the person vested as a servant of the church and cover any individuality of clothing style which may be a distraction in the service of God's Word.

Wafer

See “host.”

Return to Table of Contents

Usage: These pages may be reproduced for congregational use only. Commercial reproduction, or reproduction for sale of this work or any portion of this work, without the written permission of the copyright holder, is prohibited.
Original Source: LCMS Commission on Worship
Published by: LCMS Worship

©The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295
800-248-1930 x1265 • *worship@lcms.org* • www.lcms.org/worship